

We need a smart, secure northern border policy

Every day along our northern border, families and workers cross between the United States and Canada to shop, see relatives, work or visit as tourists. It is important that this cross-border travel and trade continues.

That's why I worked so hard last year to delay the start of onerous new rules, known as the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), from the Department of Homeland Security that will change the way people cross our unique border by requiring all travelers to carry a passport or secure document.

Although a bipartisan group of House and Senate members succeeded in having these new rules delayed from 2008 until June 1, we still have cause to be concerned about the preparedness of travelers and border checkpoints to meet the new rules and the consequences if they are not ready. About \$1.9 billion in trade crosses the U. S.- Canada border each day. This intertwining economic relationship is vital to our prosperity. The economic downturn has already affected cross-border trade and significant income could be lost if the new rules lead to long delays or people decide it is simply too cumbersome to try to cross.

As with many people who live along the U. S.-Canada border, we in Western New York do not think of the binational Buffalo-Niagara region as two separate countries, but rather as one community with a river running through it. Unlike the southern border, there are long stretches of the northern border where there is not an effort to check who is crossing. We know that illegal crossings, which are pandemic in the south, are quite rare in the north.

Of course we need to be mindful of security. In the post 9/11 era, added vigilance at all of our borders and security at airports, shipping centers and train stations are among the common-sense steps necessary to reduce the threat. But the point is that the northern border is different and we must not allow a one-size-fits-all border policy to alter the mutually beneficial relationship we enjoy with Canada.

To protect our shared prosperity, we need the government to account for the following questions: What effect is WHTI having on travel and trade across the northern border? What are the enrollment levels for frequent traveler programs? Are all border checkpoints adequately equipped? Is WHTI actually increasing northern border security?

A steady accounting of these numbers and this information will allow us to identify and mitigate any potential problems at the border as a result of WHTI.

Should problems arise as we approach peak tourist season, it is my hope that Homeland Security will adjust these rules in much the same way as airport security measures have been tweaked through trial and error.

At a time when our economy is already struggling, we must preserve the community that we have enjoyed here alongside our ally and our largest trading partner.

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